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Identity Mediators: Leadership and identity construction in campaign speeches of American presidential candidates' spouses

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Abstract

We explore the nature and evolution of the role of candidates' spouses in US presidential election campaigns through a lens of social psychological theorizing that sees leadership as emerging from activities of identity construction of leaders and followers. Our discursive analysis examines how aspiring First Lady speeches at party national conventions construct both their husbands and the particular national identity construction most presently politically relevant in a way that strategically aligns the two. Building on previous social identity work on leadership, we show how it is not only the leader or their followers who are active participants in leadership construction but that there may also be a role for 'third parties' who link prospective leaders with followers. We propose that, as 'entrepreneurs' of identity, leaders may use others as 'identity mediators' to co-construct and mediate both the leader's identity and the identity of those they seek to lead.

Abstract 148 words

Identity Mediators: Leadership and identity construction in campaign speeches of American presidential candidates' spouses

It is a political imperative within presidential politics in the United States that a candidate and their family be seen as representative of the American people. This is true right down to the First Lady's choice of dress. Michelle Obama was praised for her 'democratic style' at the 2012 Democratic National Convention (DNC): a dress custom-designed by African-American designer Tracy Reese complemented by a pair of shoes from J. Crew, an outlet viewed as stylish and affordable by many (Wilkinson, 2012). The ensemble was said to have made an elegant statement about the first family's connection to the everyday American, boosting her husband's candidacy ahead of the general election (Givhan, 2012). Indeed, the First Ladies serving between Martha Washington and Obama have shaped American identity during their husbands' tenures in office in ways that fit the historico-political era (Caroli, 2010). However, only relatively recently has the prospective First Lady served as a formal fixture in the general election campaign. This changed in 1992 with Barbara Bush's inaugural spouse speech at the Republican National Convention (RNC). Since then, each candidate's spouse has delivered a similar Convention speech. Having (at time of writing) taken place eleven times over six presidential elections, the spouse convention speech has become a televised tradition instrumental in shaping the presidential candidate's identity as a leader. In this paper, we discursively examine the identity work performed across these speeches and consider their implication for 'entrepreneurial' models of leadership that suggest that both leaders and their followers are active participants in leadership construction. We consider here the possible role of 'third party mediators' (such as a spouse) in this process.

It has been argued that, as 'entrepreneurs of identity' (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; Reicher, Haslam, & Hopkins, 2005), much of a leader's success depends on their ability to convince followers that they are 'one of them'. As such, leaders need to emphasize qualities,

attributes and behaviours that highlight commonalities with followers (Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011) and render them prototypical of the shared group. For example, Augoustinos and De Garis (2012) show how Barak Obama positioned himself in his 2008 campaign as someone who lived the American dream to ‘engineer’ his identity as a prototypical leader. However, it is potentially not only the candidates themselves who can engage in this ‘hard but rewarding work of identity management’ (Haslam et al. 2011, p. 192). We posit that others, particularly the candidates’ spouses, may play an instrumental role through their ability to mediate between the construction of the leader (‘who *s/he* is’) and the construction of group (in this case, national) identity (‘who *we* are’). By analyzing the eleven spousal speeches made at national conventions in US election campaigns until 2012 we examine how a spouse can construct her husband’s identity as being appropriate for presidential office in the particular political climate of the time. In so doing, we draw on social identity theories of leadership (e.g., Hogg, 2001; Haslam et al., 2011; Reicher et al., 2005). In line with the notion that language and discourse are the vehicles of identity development (Augoustinos & De Garis, 2012; Wetherell, 2001) we adopt a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach (Parker, 1992; van Dijk, 1993) to examine the identity management work engaged in by spouses to shape a particular construction of social reality regarding what it means to be American. Moreover, we show how this work positions the candidate as a manifestation of American norms, values and ideologies. Thus, they are not only co-constructing the identity of their spouse as a leader but also co-molding the perception of the prototype (e.g., what it means to ‘be American’) to align it with the leaders’ identity.

The spouse in United States election campaigns

Scholarly interest in presidential spouses is still young (see Watson, 2003; Stooksbury & Edgemon, 2003 for a review). To date, such work has mainly focused on three areas: the individual First Lady and her role (e.g., Borelli, 2002), the political influence they might

exert within the White House (e.g., O'Connor, Nye, & van Assendelf, 1996) and public opinion about the formal and informal construct of the office (e.g., Burrell, Elder, & Frederick, 2011). Something that remains unexamined is the prospective First Lady's role in identity construction during the presidential campaign from her unique position as someone able to address candidate's personal attributes and experiences. Such attributes are possibly important in legitimizing the candidate's leadership in the eyes of the electorate (MacManus & Quecan, 2008) and in depicting them as a 'prototypical leader'.

Social Identity Theories of Leadership

When studied from the standpoint of identity construction, leadership must be viewed as a process of group influence rather than as a product of the leader's personality (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Haslam et al., 2011; Hogg, 2001; Reicher et al., 2005). Thus, leadership and the endorsement of specific leaders can be seen as an emergent property of group dynamics. This moves beyond an individualistic perception of the leader focused on the leader's personality (e.g., Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002), specific leadership styles (e.g., Bass, 1996) or social exchange relationships between leaders and followers that emphasise interaction and (mutual) expectations between a leader and their followers (e.g., Uhl-Bien, 2006) to one where responses to leadership may be informed by characteristics of the leader as a group member (van Knippenberg, 2011). Thus, our analysis is founded on the notion of leadership as a group process (Hogg & van Knippenberg, 2003) in which both leadership and followership are made possible by a shared social identity within groups (Haslam et al., 2011). We draw on social identity theories of leadership derived from the work of both Hogg and van Knippenberg (2003) and those of Haslam, Reicher, Hopkins and colleagues (Haslam et al., 2011; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001 (for an overview of empirical findings supporting this approach see Ellemers, De Gilder & Haslam, 2004; Haslam, Steffens, Peters, Boyce, Mallett & Fransen, 2017; Hogg, van Knippenberg & Rast, 2012).

Following Hogg (2001), we see leadership as a product of a person's status as prototypical group member. Prototypicality is understood as a 'representative exemplar' of a particular category (e.g., scientists); thus, a physicist might be perceived to be more prototypical (e.g., a physicist) for the category scientists compared to a psychologist to the extent that they are more similar to other members of that category (e.g., chemists, biologists).

Thus, based on assumptions from social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987), leaders play a key role in developing shared identity with their followers and the group they are leading (Reicher et al., 2005). More precisely, Hogg (2001) argues that group members who are most able to position themselves as resembling a group prototype acquire power and influence over other members of the group. Moreover, group members use this constructed prototype to make sense of their own identities, often adopting the prototype's defining qualities and behaviors as their own. If those group members who are perceived as the most prototypical have the most influence over the group then it follows that, to attain power over a group, one must work to be perceived as prototypical by, for example, following norms, showing greater in-group loyalty, and exhibiting self-sacrificing behavior for the group (Hogg, 2001; see also Abrams, Randsley de Moura, & Travaglino, 2013). However, a group's defining qualities and goals are not static, and neither is its prototype (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). As Haslam et al (2011) put it: 'precisely because definitions of identity have such social and political consequences, leaders will seek to mold these definitions to their own purpose rather than accept them as given' (p. 146). Thus, leaders can actively try to influence group members' shared understandings, values and world-views, as do, mostly likely, their closest aids. In the context of a US general election, the target of influence is the American people, whom presidential nominees must persuade to accept certain visions of Americanism that support their candidacies and portray themselves as 'one of us' (Augoustinos & De Garis, 2012).

However, this does not mean that ‘anything goes’. Candidates must work within a wide variety of constraints to persuade the American people that their suggestions are in line with the group’s pre-established identity (Gleibs & Haslam, 2016). Consequently, the ‘content of influence’ (Haslam et al., 2011) in American presidential politics needs to be consistent with what the group can be convinced is hearable as inherently ‘American’.

Leadership and identity construction as a social process

Shaping the ‘content of influence’ requires the active management of the leader’s identity, as well as the identity of the group they seek to lead. In American presidential politics, candidates must diminish differences between a perceived ‘American identity’ and their own, and they must negotiate any discrepancies that might arise between their own values, goals and beliefs and those of the electorate. Of course the superordinate category of ‘Americans’ in question is, in itself, diverse and contested (Citrin, Wong, & Duff, 2001; Devos & Banaji, 2005) and by no means a fixed representation of a specific ‘American identity’. Different subgroups in American society have different preferences for the definition and relative importance of the content or definition of what it means to be American. For example, Rutchick & Eccleston (2010) showed that ‘Believing in God’ and ‘Supporting American troops’ are key elements of national identity for Republicans more so than Democrats, with the reverse being true for ‘Supporting equality for all people’ and ‘Being knowledgeable about other cultures’. However, for a common ingroup (e.g., American) appeal to be successful, one might argue that the representation of the superordinate group held by the person invoking the identity (e.g., the presidential candidate) and the recipient (e.g., voters) should be aligned as much as possible. The exceptionally successful life paths (and in some cases rather prestigious family backgrounds) of presidential candidates and their families, as well as their political identification as a Republican or Democrat (Rutchick & Eccleston, 2010) make it clear that they have not lived the typical or

‘average American’ experience. This arguably makes it difficult for them to be seen as ‘one of us’. To boost their perceived prototypicality and exhibit a shared sense of ‘us’, candidates might downplay discrepancies and focus on what they and the American people have in common. They might do so by discussing topics such as family, invoking the American dream by stressing their own humble beginnings or referring to ‘American values’ such as freedom. Importantly, we suggest that the ‘myth’ (Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2004) around what things like ‘family’, ‘the American dream’ or ‘defense of freedom’ might mean can also be used to merge the candidate’s experiences and priorities with those of many American people.

In the context of a presidential election, the focus on family highlights the candidate’s relation with the American people and their shared experience as a parent, child, sibling etc. (for the importance of ‘family’ for political leadership see Schonhardt-Bailey, Yager, & Lahlou, 2012; Sorrentino & Augustinos, 2016). Hence, the involvement of the candidates’ *spouses* in the conversation enhances this by highlighting that the candidates themselves are part of a family. Therefore, the spouse is in a unique position to enhance the relational recognition of the candidate’s prototypicality and role as leader. The First Lady inhabits a space in between the leader/power and the ‘ordinary people’ (e.g., followers/the electorate) and is therefore able to simultaneously speak with intimate knowledge about the candidate and their qualities as a potential president *and* speak of America from a more ‘ordinary’/‘common’ perspective. Hence, the spouse may become instrumental in constructing the candidate’s position as prototypical according to certain hegemonic notions of Americanism, thus the spouse and their speech become an important part of the candidate’s identity work. By ‘identity work’ we refer to ‘people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising’ their identities (Svenningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165). We seek to demonstrate how the spouse is able to discuss personal aspects of

the candidate to discursively align them with carefully-fashioned (historically-occasioned) versions of putatively shared values, experiences, and collective memory of the American people.

The Discursive Construction of Americanism

The concept of ‘Americanism’ is widely acknowledged but poorly defined, and there are many different definitions around the meaning of ‘being American’ (Citrin, Wong, & Duff, 2001; Devos & Banaji, 2005; Rutchick & Eccleston, 2010). These range from ideals like liberty, justice, and democracy; a Puritan and Protestant heritage (Heclo, 2007); and a ‘Frontier Spirit’, or celebration of independence and individual goal pursuit (Kitayama, Ishii, Imada, Takemura & Ramaswamy, 2006). Others yet might see ‘America’ as a land of hope and opportunity, a nation of immigrants, or a cultural melting pot. Ricento (2003) argues that while there are many opposing ideas regarding American identity, certain discourses of Americanism comprise a dominant view, namely, those that subtly support the interests of dominant groups such as whites, heterosexuals, males, English speakers or Christians. More marginalized discourses, including the idea that there is no cultural consensus regarding Americanism, are less commonly drawn upon in the public sphere because to do so would often not serve the speaker’s interest in presenting themselves as speaking on behalf of ‘the nation’ (Ricento, 2003).

The current research takes a similar position, arguing that public figures, and especially presidential candidates and their spouses, assume and further propagate versions of a presupposed cultural consensus that implicitly ascribes certain meanings to Americanism and concepts associated with it. One might think of these as political ‘myths’ of nation or the narratives that a “community uses to represent itself to itself” (Hopkins & Kahini-Hopkins, 2004, p. 354) and that come to affect the political conditions of the group (Esch, 2010).

However, their particular construction of what it means to be ‘American’ is impregnated with strategic significance that puts their identity-relevant (i.e., party/ ideological) interests and actions at the forefront. As Tudor (1972, cited in Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2004) explains, proffering a myth, for example about a particular ‘Frontier’ version of America, is always a deliberate act whereby ‘an individual stamp will be left upon it [the myth] no matter how orthodox the narrator tries to be’ (p. 48). Thus, the identity content that pertains to the discursive construction of Americanism invoked by the particular candidate and their spouse is a strategic exercise in fashioning a particular characterization of America that fits with the strategic needs of the candidate at the specific historico-political moment. Even though there is clearly not actually ‘one America(n)’, the rhetorical task of the First Lady is arguably to draw upon and flexibly remold a version of national identity that is hearable as such to as wide an audience as possible. Thus, while a great deal of political rhetoric in the public sphere may potentially work, as Recento (2003) suggests, in ways that subtly support the interests of dominant groups (e.g., whites, heterosexuals, males) this is clearly not necessarily the rhetorical agenda of all would-be First Ladies, Michelle Obama being a clear case in point. What we demonstrate however is that there are certain myths of the American nation that can be put to rhetorical work across the political and demographic spectrum, such as those relating to family values, defense of freedom and the ‘American Dream’.

Present Study

Our discursive analysis examines how the presidential spouses, in their speeches at the parties’ national conventions, construct and attend to their husbands as prototypical Americans by acting as rather unique mediators who can simultaneously speak with hearable authority and authenticity (as ‘their wife’) about both the qualities of the would-be leader and (as an ‘American wife/mother’) the shared identity of the group (American nation) that their husband seeks to lead. We build on previous social identity work on leadership that positions

social identities as actively (co-) constructed by relevant social actors (Augoustinos & De Garis, 2012), in our case the candidates' spouses. We show how it is not only the leader or their followers who are active participants in leadership construction, but that there may also be a case for the role for 'third party mediators' who link and align the constructions of prospective leaders with followers.

Methodology

Theoretical approach

Most American presidential campaigns choose to discuss what Americans have in common in order to perceptually draw the nation together under the candidate's leadership – using certain dominant constructions of American identity. Haslam et al. (2011) consider this strategy central to the attainment of social power, or the 'power to shape social reality' (p. 139). An empirical investigation of the ways in which strategies of social interaction shape social reality necessitates an analysis of how these processes are achieved in discourse. Accordingly, to analyze the ways in which political discourse, and specifically the spouse campaign speech, constructs what it means to be American, we use CDA (Parker, 1992; van Dijk, 1993). By treating the production of talk and text as an act of social construction of reality (rather than merely the outcome of a cognitive process), CDA allows one to empirically examine *how* the first ladies' speeches can be seen to perform rhetorical work, shape social reality and thus mold the leaders' identity. Van Dijk (1993) suggests that CDA represents 'a detailed description, explanation and critique of the ways dominant discourses (indirectly) influence...socially shared knowledge, attitudes and ideologies' (p. 258). Within this perspective, the current study analyzes the rhetorical strategies used by speakers to position candidates as prototypical within specific hegemonic discourses of Americanism.

Data corpus

The data analyzed represent all public speeches given by presidential spouses up to 2012 at the respective parties' national conventions that traditionally initiate the general election campaign. As aforementioned, the first such speech was delivered by Barbara Bush at the 1992 RNC. Since then, each subsequent candidate's spouse had (at time of writing) delivered a similar speech at their respective national party convention, providing us with a data corpus of eleven speeches over six presidential elections. Speech transcripts were obtained from various online news sources using Google searches (see Appendix for a full list of, and links to, speeches). All transcripts were checked for accuracy against original audio-visual recordings also sourced online, leading to only a small number of very minor edits. In the case of one speech this could only be done against the original audio as full video was not available (links to the original audio/video recordings are also in our appendix).

Analytic approach

The first step of the analysis involved repeated and close reading of each speech by the second author. This process led to the development of a 'body of instances' (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) comprising all sections of the text where speakers performed a discursive maneuver that constructed either the identity of the candidate (their spouse) – 'who he is' – and/or the nature of the American identity – who 'we all are'. The body of instances derived from each speech was then analyzed by all three authors to identify common and recurrent identity constructions. This was an iterative process that involved reading and re-reading the excerpts and discussion of how the discursive work being performed by the speakers related to our research question. At this point it became apparent that the historico-political period in which the speeches were delivered greatly affected the rhetoric of candidate's spouses (see more under *Analysis and Discussion*, below). Hence, we structured our analysis around three

periods that represented important breaks in recent history: a focus on family values during times of prosperity in the 90s, a focus on foreign policy following the 9/11 attacks and the Iraq War and a focus on domestic economic concerns in the wake of the 2008 financial crash). We analyze each speech in relation to the ways in which speakers constructed their spouse as possessing the group-prototypical qualities that render them best able to lead the nation through the present political issues in a way that fitted with their simultaneously constructed version of what it supposedly meant to be ‘American’. We considered how American identity is constructed in each speech, examined how Americans were constructed and how the candidate was positioned as prototypical. The extracts included in our analysis section below represent the most illustrative examples from each of the 11 speeches of the commonly recurrent rhetorical maneuvers that we observed across the dataset, while noting that such maneuvers were constructed in relation to different specific historically-occasioned topics within each of the three time periods.

Analysis and Discussion

The appearance of the first spousal speech at political party conventions

In 1992, Republicans (George H. W. Bush) and Democrats (under Clinton) condensed their campaign messages into two contrasting slogans: ‘family values’ and ‘the personal is political’. Although the Republican campaign never explained in detail what it meant by ‘family values’, Freeman (1993) argues that through its documents and speeches it implicitly stood for ‘programs and policies that strengthen the traditional two-parent, patriarchal family in which the husband is the bread-winner, the wife is the caretaker, and children are completely subject to parental authority’ (p. 21). In contrast, the Democratic campaign platform included issues that were previously considered to be outside of the political realm, such as abortion, work-family balance and discrimination against nontraditional lifestyles.

Although the Republican Party had traditionally supported an over-arching political philosophy that favored individual choice, during the 1992 election party members adopted opposing positions regarding some of these issues, notably that of abortion rights. In response to conflict around the Republican Party's stances on divisive issues and in an attempt to unite the nation under the leadership of George H.W. Bush, the Republicans nominated – for the first time- the candidate's spouse, Barbara Bush, to deliver a speech discussing the campaign topic of family values at the RNC. In this case, a member of the candidate's own nuclear family occupied an ideal and unique position from which to speak to construct the candidate and 'America' as sharing the same 'family values'. As we will show in this next section of our analysis, this 'myth' (c.f. Hopkins & Kahini-Hopkins, 2004) of 'the American family' would remain a key rhetorical focus of spousal speeches through both the 1996 and 2000 campaigns. However, what we also show in that section is that, as Hopkins & Kahini-Hopkins (2004) put it, 'the myths that a community uses to represent itself to itself - and so discern its interests – are saturated with strategic significance. Identities are never defined in a vacuum but are always constructed in a context of controversy where others articulate alternatives" (p.354). Thus, we demonstrate how the very nature of what constitutes, for example, American 'family (values)' is rhetorically fashioned and molded by the spouses in ways that best align with the policy platforms and, crucially in this context, personal qualities of their husbands.

'We' are family (1992-2000)

The elections in 1992, 1996 and 2000 fell during an era characterized by an extended period of economic prosperity during which the GDP increased continuously for almost 10 years, ending with the 2000s recession. The growth came after a recession in 1990-91, being partially sparked by the 1st Gulf War. After 12 years of Republican presidency (Reagan 1981-1989; Bush 1989-1993), Bill Clinton capitalized on economic frustration and fatigue of the

American people and defeated George H.W. Bush in the 1992 election. From 1993 onwards the economy boomed in the US with growth of GDP between 3-4%. Politically, this era was characterized by the fall of world communism and hope for sustained peace but also saw the emergence of new ethnic conflicts in Africa, the Balkans and the Caucasus. Culturally, multiculturalism and the new technologies such as the internet were major advances.

As we have described above, both election campaigns in 1992 centered on debates around ‘family values’ and the Republican party nominated Barbara Bush for the inaugural spouse speech. In this speech, Bush discusses meeting single, working parents, grandparents raising their children’s children, and families of sick children during George’s first term in office. She then describes what she means by ‘family values’.

- (1) As in our family, as in American families everywhere, the parents we’ve met are determined to teach their children integrity, strength, responsibility, courage, sharing, love of God and pride in being an American. However you define family, that’s what we mean by family values.

By including varieties of family structures that differ from the patriarchal nuclear family, as well as by presenting struggling families as heroes, she constructs her own family as identifying with and sympathizing with most Americans. However, to position her family as prototypical of the archetypal ‘American family’ she discusses the values that she and the candidate share. Integrity, strength, responsibility, and so on are individualistic values that point back to America’s founding documents, written mainly by religious dissidents of Northern European ancestry (Ricento, 2003).

Similar elements emerge four years later in Elizabeth Dole’s speech at the 1996 RNC. She discusses family values in a way that positions her husband’s own family’s poverty as strength.

- (2) But while they [Bob Dole's family] were poor, perhaps, in material things, they were rich in values- values like honesty, decency, respect; values like personal responsibility, hard work, love of God, love of family, and patriotism. These are the values that led Bob on the battlefields of Italy. These are the values that helped sustain him in over three years in the hospital.

Here, like Bush in 1992, Dole describes her husband as the embodiment of the same virtues and religious beliefs that the people of America have been constructed as sharing. Most importantly for our current theoretical purpose, she mobilizes these familially-inherited values as explanations for her husband's ability to have overcome adversity or hardship in his life as a soldier. The final sentence in this extract is also of note in demonstrating how speaking from the position as his spouse arguably affords her a unique ability here to evoke 'vulnerable' images of the candidate in his hospital bed in ways that would seem quite discordant if performed by any other speaker at a party convention. For example, in contrast, the only characterization of Dole made in his running mate Jack Kemp's speech at the same DNC referred to him as "A man whose words convey a quiet strength, who knows what it means to sacrifice for others, to sacrifice for his country, to demonstrate courage under fire". While the running mate must arguably attend to the 'strength' of the man literally dodging bullets on the battlefield, we see above how the spouse is afforded the opportunity to allow the nation to see the candidate through the sympathetic eye of an imagined bedside vigil¹. Despite Elizabeth Dole herself being a Republican Party senator, in this context she speaks as 'wife', not as 'politician', allowing her to (acceptably) show a side of the candidate that the other elements of the party machine cannot.

Two weeks after Dole's speech, Hillary Clinton delivered a speech introducing her husband at the 1996 DNC in Chicago. Like Bush and Dole, Clinton refers to raising children and the difficulties that surround it. In line with the campaign slogan that 'the personal is

political', she positions families with two working parents, such as her own, as typical American families and discusses a legislative measure supported by her husband concerning flextime for working parents that aimed to lend support to families that departed from the more traditional gendered roles of bread-winner and home-maker.

- (3) We all know that raising kids is a full-time job, and since most parents work, they are, — we are — stretched thin... That's why my husband wants to pass a flex-time law.

We see here how Clinton invokes the image of the American family and works to construct her (and her husband's) experience of family life as commensurate with that of the American people ("We all know"; "they are – we are"). However she refashions the particular nature of the mythical American family to one that suits her husband's electoral platform. Unlike Bush and Dole, who focused on their husbands' traditional family values, Clinton discusses the demands of family life and her husband's determination to support the American family in facing them. She positions her family as representative in having experienced the struggles of 'most parents' and as exemplary in each having an *especially* demanding career while together successfully raising a child. Furthermore, by implying that the typical American mother works, Clinton refers to the American work ethic in the same terms for women as for men. She unites the theme of American family life present in the speeches of her two Republican predecessors with a form of progressivism supported by the Democratic Party in the 1990s by discursively re-defining the very nature of 'the American family'.

Although the Republican and Democratic spouse speeches up to 1996 support different campaign agendas, they reinforce the idea of the centrality of the family in American life. While the traditional nuclear family is not constructed as being the only

acceptable American family structure, the act of raising children is constructed to be a central and perhaps defining part of being American. In her speech at the 2000 RNC, Laura Bush continues to celebrate the role of children in American life by discussing her career as a teacher, her passion for early childhood development, and raising her two daughters. Before discussing any of his personal attributes or policy proposals, she portrays George as a loving father who reads to his children.

- (4) George and I always read to our girls -- Dr. Seuss' 'Hop on Pop' was one of his favorites. George would lie on the floor and the girls would literally hop on pop, turning story time into a contact sport.

In referring to a highly popular children's book and invoking an image of a typical living room, she connects her family's experience to those of what she suggests to be other typical American families.

In the second half of her speech, Bush transitions from describing George as a head of the family to positioning him as the leader of the United States. She describes his 'strength and constancy of conviction' and his upbringing in Midland, Texas, 'a place of family and community' that has 'a sense of possibility as big as the West Texas sky'. She describes how the people of Midland are representative of those from all over the USA.

- (5) This is America. Down-to-earth people who work hard, who care for our neighbors, who want a better life for our children. And the people of America deserve a leader who lifts our sights, who inspires us to dream bigger and do more.

We see here again how the very nature of what America '*is*' is up for rhetorical negotiation. Bush positions Midland as a quintessential American town by anointing it with characteristics that no version of the American narrative (or indeed most national narratives) would call into

question, namely, hard work, compassion, and (most notably here) dedication to one's children. However she then invokes a particular version of American identity with her reference to the American 'sense of possibility as big as the West Texas sky'. She geographically and metaphorically links the concept of the American dream to George's constructed campaign persona as the down-to-earth, Texan family man. Finally, as 'a leader who lifts our sights, who inspires us to dream bigger and do more', George is constructed as someone who inspires Americans to be an even fuller expression of their previously constructed selves. It is not just that he represents what 'we are', he also represents what 'we want to be'.

At the 2000 DNC, Tipper Gore also worked to show the American public that her family life is similar to theirs. Accompanied by a slideshow resembling a family photo album, she emphasizes Al's commitment to his faith and family.

- (6) Many of you know that faith and family are at the center of Al's life. Many of you know Al to be a decisive leader with strong values, deeply held convictions, and an unwavering commitment to making the American dream a reality for all our people.

This argument is remarkably similar to that of Laura Bush's speech. Like Bush, Gore reproduces the dominant idea of an America centered on the family and grounded in Christian values. However, Gore's claim that her husband is committed to 'making the American dream a reality for all our people' works to differentiate Al as a leader who would implement policies to support the poor, and constructs a version of America that, presumably out of its Christian values, should be supportive of these same measures. Gore constructs a version of the American identity centered upon looking to support those around/below

oneself, in contrast to Bush's construction of a nation gazing ever upward to that to which they aspire.

Using myths of the American family, Gore and her predecessors from both parties each construct a specific version of Americanism that aligns with their husbands' simultaneously constructed personas as prototypical leaders. Each speaker references a combination of well-worn discourses to make the constructed America appear 'true' and 'natural'. The majority of these constructions (bar Clinton's 1996 speech), both up to this point and in subsequent periods, tend towards reproduce the same conservative depiction of the American family that the Democratic Party sought to challenge in 1992. Thus, the spouse speeches from both parties would continue to reify dominant ideas regarding the American family.

"We" are defenders of freedom (2004)

In 2004 the key 'context of controversy' (Hopkins & Kahini-Hopkins, 2004) changed from 'family values' and the 'personal is political' to that of American foreign policy following the 9/11 terrorists attacks in the USA in 2001 and the US invasion of Iraq. The Democrats (under Kerry) campaigned in opposition to war in Iraq, while the Republicans (under George Bush Jnr) maintained that America should stay the course. As a result, the national myth of strategic importance that spouses were rhetorically fashioning becomes, we argue, that of Americans as 'defenders of freedom', a 'myth' brought into sharp relief following 9/11 and the following invasions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

During the DNC, Teresa Heinz Kerry opened her speech by declaring, 'I invite you to join in our conversation, and together with us work towards the noblest purpose of all: a free, good and democratic society', setting the stage for a critical dialogue with the American people about the United States' goals. Her construction of the 'noblest' purpose of the United

States being a free, good and democratic society worked to position the Bush administration as representing an America that is not free, good or democratic. In contrast to her depiction of the Bush administration, she likens the America she envisions to a young Peace Corps volunteer.

- (7) That face symbolizes this country: young, curious, brimming with idealism and hope — and a real, honest compassion...For many generations of people around this globe, that is what America has represented. A symbol of hope, a beacon brightly lit by the optimism of its people.

Heinz Kerry draws upon the tradition of American exceptionalism by contrasting her hopeful America, unique among nations, to that of the fearful America under the Bush administration. In a way, she invokes a form of constructive patriotism (Sekerdej & Roccas, 2016), which involves showing respect for the nation but also questioning and evaluating it with a willingness to change.

She then concludes her speech in reference to Abraham Lincoln's first inaugural address declaring that the American people are waiting to be summoned by 'the better angels of [their] nature' to choose a leader who will draw upon 'the mystic chords of memory' and ends her speech by suggesting that a vote for John would 'restore our faith in ourselves and in the sense of limitless opportunity that has always been America's gift to the world'. In so doing, Heinz Kerry constructs the nature of America's global defense of freedom in relation to an image of the nation that is diametrically opposed to military aggression; again invoking a strong sense of constructive patriotism and with it a 'loving criticism' (Sekerdej & Roccas, 2016) of the status quo. That is, Heinz Kerry is able to act as a mediator who aligns her husband with an American identity constructed as being rooted in collective memory of historical, peaceful, moral purity.

Laura Bush was provided with a chance to respond to Heinz Kerry's condemnation of the Bush administration in her own speech to the 2004 RNC. However, instead of responding directly to campaign criticisms, she explains that America is 'living in the midst of the most historic struggle [her] generation has ever known' and that her husband is working to 'protect our country and defeat terror so that all children can grow up in a more peaceful world'. She summons America to support its troops, who (by her account) represent the defenders of freedom.

(8) As we gather in this hall and around our television sets tonight, Joshua Crane stands watch aboard the USS John C. Stennis. His brothers, Matthew and Nicholas, stand watch near Fallujah. At home in Colorado, their mother, Cindy, stands watch too -- with worry, and prayer... Our nation is grateful to all the men and women of our armed forces who are standing guard on the front lines of freedom.

In thanking the Crane family for their service on behalf of the nation, Bush works to position Americans as supportive of the troops (and by proxy, the war) in Iraq. Furthermore, she works to align such support with a shared experience of sympathy and gratitude toward military families by vividly depicting the mother of three enlisted soldiers that America has just come to know on a first-name basis. Bush declares that while nobody wants to go to war, both some heroic presidents of the past and her husband made such a decision for the right reasons, namely, the defense of freedom (from various emblems of tyranny).

(9) No American president ever wants to go to war. Abraham Lincoln didn't want to go to war, but he knew saving the union required it. Franklin Roosevelt didn't want to go to war, but he knew defeating tyranny demanded it. And my husband didn't want to go to war, but he knew the safety and security of America and the world depended on it.

We can see how Bush draws on the same notions of collective memory and past moral purity as Heinz Kerry by positioning her husband's going to war as consistent with the freedom-defending decisions of two celebrated American presidents of the past. Once again, Americans are invited to look back to historical statements for guidance on what the mythical freedom-defending, 'true American' should propose to do in present circumstances.

"We" are ordinary folks (2008-2012)

The 2008 and 2012 elections followed the financial crisis of 2008 and the beginning of a cycle of high unemployment in the United States. Salient political issues shifted away from terrorism and war toward domestic concerns. Thus, the national identity myth that required negotiation shifted to the idea that even those who 'make it' in America can start out as just 'ordinary folks'. In this period the Democratic and Republican parties each maintained distinct positions regarding the nation's path to economic recovery. The Democrats championed interventions such as increasing taxes to fund social programs and raising the federal minimum wage. Barack Obama was positioned as someone who understood the average person's struggles and as a champion of said 'ordinary folks'. The Republicans, who historically maintained a commitment to free markets and individual economic choice, proposed policies such as lowering taxes and reducing government spending. In 2008, the Republicans positioned John McCain as a 'maverick' who selflessly chose to serve his community and nation. In 2012, the party positioned Mitt Romney as someone who was committed to improving the nation's economy through hard work and proven ability. That means, although the 'American Dream' might be a rhetorical common-place in US political discourse that we have seen in earlier periods (see Extract 6, or in a more subtle allusion Extract 5), in this final period we see that the spouses work to portrait the candidates as 'prototypical' for ordinary folk with humble beginnings. Thus, at a time when understanding the struggles of a nation suffering to make ends meet was of ultimate importance, all

candidates' spouses drew upon and fashioned elements from various discourses of Americanism in their speeches to position their husbands as representative of, or at least understanding of 'ordinary folks'.

Michelle Obama, in her 2008 DNC speech, details the Obama family's 'improbable journey' that brought them there. She depicts her upbringing in the South Side of Chicago by a blue-collar father and talks about how her husband was raised by 'grandparents who were working-class folks just like [her] parents'. She describes the workers that her husband was committed to helping.

(10) They were parents living paycheck to paycheck... Those folks weren't asking for a handout or a shortcut. They were ready to work — they wanted to contribute. They believed — like you and I believe — that America should be a place where you can make it if you try.

Obama positions those who are struggling to 'build a good life' as heroes that embody the national identity ideal that people who are willing to work hard should succeed. Crucially, we see here how she does not *only* utilize her ability as spouse to speak with authority of her husband's commitment to this ideal. She *also* uses her footing as 'a spouse' (rather than 'a politician') to speak as an everyday American ('They believed – like you and I believe').

Shortly thereafter, Cindy McCain opened her RNC speech by positioning Americans as compassionate people who help one another in times of need. Referencing Americans' response to a hurricane that impacted the Gulf Coast a few days prior, McCain explains, 'It is not only our natural instinct to rally to them, to lift them up with our prayers and come to their aid. It is also our duty to our country'. She then discusses how the Republican Party, like the American people, has always displayed such compassion.

(11) From its very birth, our party has been grounded in the notion of service, community and self-reliance ... and it's all tempered by a uniquely American faith in — and compassion for — each other's neighbors... That generosity of spirit is in our national DNA.

She later goes on to describe her own upbringing and her own father.

(12) I was born and raised in the American West and will always see the world through the prism of its values. My father was a true "Western gentleman." He rose from hardscrabble roots to realize the American dream. With only a few borrowed dollars in his pocket, a strong back and a can-do spirit, he built a great life for his family

Just like Obama, McCain references her extended family's humble beginnings and employs a certain type of diction to connect with those she positions as typical Americans. She then transitions to discussing her husband's refusal to become a 'Washington insider'.

(13) If Americans want straight talk and the plain truth they should take a good close look at John McCain ... a man who's served in Washington without ever becoming a Washington insider...

Thus, McCain positions her husband as embodying the 'straight talk' and 'plain truth' for which the ordinary folks of America are constructed as yearning. She distinguishes him from a perceived out-group of 'Washington insiders', the antithesis of ordinary folks with which she has revealed that she shares a lineage. Thus, she condemns big government, which she implicitly associates with the Democratic Party, and celebrates ordinary Americans, who she constructs as having more in common with herself, and by proxy, her husband. Via a celebration of the moral excellence of ordinary folks she constructs a form of Americanism that aligns neatly with John McCain's 'maverick' identity and small government platform.

By 2012, the economy had still not fully recovered, and Americans were anxious over the sustained cycle of unemployment. The Republican Party elected Mitt Romney as its presidential nominee. As a man with extensive business experience and who, as former Governor of Massachusetts, had executed programs widely considered successful, Romney was presented as someone extraordinarily capable of leading economic recovery. However, his wealth risked making him seem 'out of touch' with the average ordinary folks struggling to 'make ends meet'. Therefore, in an attempt to connect her and her husband's experience with that of ordinary folks, Ann Romney describes during the 2012 RNC the early days of her marriage (their college years).

(14) We got married and moved into a basement apartment. We walked to class together, shared the housekeeping, and ate a lot of pasta and tuna fish. Our desk was a door propped up on sawhorses. Our dining room table was a fold down ironing board in the kitchen.

Romney evokes here the image of this (albeit transient) period of their lives in which they lived a somewhat frugal and simple existence. This works to draw upon her intimate knowledge of her husband's experience in a way that attempts to align them (and thus him) in some way with the struggles of ordinary American folks. What is more, this arguably turns the couple's well publicized current wealth to potential advantage in the sense that other American families whose lives might resemble the depiction of her own past here are, by this account, constructed as capable of attaining the same kinds of lucrative outcomes in the future that she and her husband have enjoyed.

One week later, Michelle Obama addressed the 2012 DNC. As in 2008, she explains how her husband chose to work in neighborhoods devastated by unemployment instead of

pursuing financial gain. She then underscores how her husband's success has not changed him from the ordinary guy that she has intimate memories of from her youth.

- (15) You see, even though back then Barack was a Senator and a presidential candidate, to me, he was still the guy who'd picked me up for our dates in a car that was so rusted out, I could actually see the pavement going by through a hole in the passenger side door. He was the guy whose proudest possession was a coffee table he'd found in a dumpster, and whose only pair of decent shoes was half a size too small.

Obama works to make her husband's early life appear even more humble than the Romneys', which reflects the extensive efforts both campaigns made in 2012 to connect with what was considered 'the average American'. She goes on to emphasize that her husband's decisions in the White House are based on his experiences.

- (16) Barack knows the American Dream because he's lived it...And he believes that when you've worked hard, and done well, and walked through that doorway of opportunity...you do not slam it shut behind you...you reach back, and you give other folks the same chances that helped you succeed.

Here Obama creates an out-group of those who have succeeded and have ungenerously 'slammed the door shut' behind them. In doing so, Obama implies that her husband's opponent (Romney) represents this (perceived out-) group and – as Heinz Kerry earlier—invokes a strong constructive patriotism that challenges a version of the American dream predicated on an individualist focus on personal advancement. She recasts it in terms of *responsibility*, not just opportunity, thus engaging in a critique of the status quo of the nation (Sekerdej & Roccas, 2016). Thus, we see how the spousal speech does not only provide a key rhetorical platform for the candidate's spouse to attempt to construct a particular version of

who their husband is (e.g., someone who has lived the American dream). It is also a vehicle for constructing the very nature of that dream (in Obama's case, as one that a 'good American' helps others to share).

Spousal speeches in this period also highlight how although national myths such as the 'American dream' might be thought of as somewhat consensual or hegemonic, their precise nature is up for flexible negotiation that allows speakers to use them to achieve a variety of quite different rhetorical ends. Obama, like McCain and Romney, uses the discourse of the 'ordinary folk' to position her husband as a prototypical American leader. However, she does so in a way that constructs the American people as supportive of a more activist state. McCain and Romney, on the other hand, advocate for more limited government, highlighting individual accomplishment and interpersonal compassion.

General Discussion

The goal of this research was to understand the role of spousal speeches in identity construction of political leaders. We have critically examined how spouses of presidential candidates position their husbands as prototypical by actively constructing particular notions of Americanism and speaking of their husbands from a position uniquely afforded by their role as 'wife'. Our analysis reveals that certain dominant concepts underlying Americanism are brought to bear depending on the historico-political context, and that these concepts themselves can be shaped by the candidate's spouses to support the candidacy of their husbands. For instance, shared national myths constructing America in relation to 'family values', 'defense of freedom' and 'the American dream' each become central during different phases between 1992 and 2012. In all three cases, we show that although the relevant myths represent somewhat hegemonic notions of national identity that all three speakers must attend to, the specific nature of the ideologies that underpin them (and the policy approaches that

might be putatively underpinned by them) are very much up for rhetorical negotiation.

Speaking primarily in their role as ‘a wife/mother’ (rather than ‘a politician’) affords prospective First Ladies a unique footing from which to engage in such negotiation.

Moreover, it is through this subtle molding of these hegemonic tropes that the spouses work to align these notions of American identity with the qualities of their husbands, of which they can speak with uniquely intimate knowledge.

Thus, we have demonstrated that ‘entrepreneurs’ of identity might also potentially benefit from the work of identity ‘mediators’ – those uniquely positioned to build bridges between them and the putatively shared identities of the groups they seek to lead. In the case of the presidential election, the spouse becomes an ideal embodiment of such a mediator. We have conceptualized leadership within social identity traditions that perceive leadership as a shared and joint activity (Hogg, 2001; Haslam et al., 2011; van Knippenberg, 2011). We extend such formulations here by arguing that leadership is not only a process involving leaders and followers, but can also involve ‘third parties’ who are able to engage in discursive work that (re-)affirms the leader’s position. In the present study the identity mediators are closely aligned with the leader, and indeed this intimate alignment forms part of their unique status in the identity construction in question. However, one might not necessarily assume that other mediators of leadership identity need be so closely aligned. Future research could explore how closely aligned with the leader those occupying such potential mediational roles may actually need to be. This becomes particularly interesting when considered in light of the fact that an identity mediator’s ability to speak with authoritative knowledge about the personal qualities of the leader, on the one hand, and as a member of the wider group on the other are likely to (often) be inversely proportional.

Another important point emerging from this research relates to how politicians who are female and candidate’s spouses (who are female) may differently manage their own (and

indeed their partner's) gender identity in the political sphere. For example, Sorrentino and Augoustinos (2016) recently demonstrated the ways in which former Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard had to construct her gender identity as being irrelevant. While in office, Gillard was constantly required to strategically manage her identity as a woman and often to downplay the importance of prototypical female domains on account of her not being able to (in her case) claim membership of the identity categories of either 'mother' or 'wife'. In contrast, the women in our paper here highlight their role as mothers and wives and are often playing into common gender-stereotypes such as 'mother-in-chief'. Thus, whereas politicians who are female are often penalized for using 'the gender card' (also see Falk, 2013; Donaghue, 2015), those who support (male) partners are applauded for doing so. As we have seen in the current analysis, particular forms of gendered identities ('mother'; 'wife') can be used to perform important rhetorical identity work when invoked by a spouse of a candidate, albeit to varied political ends, as we saw in Hillary Clinton's more progressive construction of the American Family in 1996. Moreover, spouses' constructions of male candidates as a 'father' (such as Bush's image of 'Hop on Pop') arguably work because, although they humanize the candidate, the role of 'father' conjures up stereotypical imagery that is not in conflict with societal understandings and expectations of leadership. However, female political leaders (and their male spouses who may wish to speak on their behalf) arguably find themselves in a double-bind where construction of the candidate as a 'mother' or 'wife' may not play well with the electorate but avoiding doing so may see them penalized for violating societal expectations of stereotypical femininity.

Limitations

The contribution of the analyses we present here is of course necessarily limited in the sense that we have focused on the construction of identity and prototype but not whether or not the constructed and used versions of American identity resonate with the voters. Put

bluntly: Are these speeches just ‘feel good moments’, or do they actually garner votes? This might be best addressed through quantitative research that seeks to measure the cognitive impacts of exposure to the kinds of rhetorical identity mediational work that we identify here. Such work might also seek to begin to unpack the potential effects of the aforementioned trade-offs that could result from different *degrees* of alignment (of various kinds) between mediators and leaders.

Moreover, the current study is limited to a specific political context that is rather unique. In particular, the set of speeches that we analyzed are part of highly professional political machinery, which begs the question whether we can generalize from our findings to other contexts. Future research should therefore primarily focus on establishing whether the concept of identity mediators is present in other (political or organizational) contexts and the different roles potential mediators could perform.

We acknowledge that our particular interpretations of what constitutes constructions of identities are potentially subjective and open to question. This is true of any form of analysis of written text that does not quantify language use and is a specific feature of CDA. There are certainly recent examples in the domain of political identity work that do quantify language to good effect (e.g., Steffens & Haslam, 2012), and we appreciate the quantitative rigor of such approaches and the particular insights that they reveal. However, such methodologies are far less able to show the *ways* in which complex and subtle rhetorical formulations construct particular versions of social reality. A desire for such insights necessitates the use of qualitative analyses, as we have performed here. All the speeches that we have analyzed are publically available (see appendix) and, as such, our analyses are open to scrutiny, potential disagreement, and challenge. The fact that they are freely available is also important in the light of the fact that we could, as we are working in the boundaries of a

specific word-limit, only present a few, indicative quotes from each speech rather than the full body of instances that speak to a particular discursive maneuver.

Conclusion

We argue that social identity theories of leadership should move beyond the ‘dyadic’ process between leaders and followers to also consider the possible role of third parties that fall between the concept of leader and followers. Although the notion of relational leadership has gained popularity in leadership research (Uhl-Bien, 2006), very little work has included the notion that leadership can be mediated through a third party. This paper represents a tentative step in expanding our understanding of leadership as a process that may extend beyond the limited focus of leader-follower relationships to include the wider social network in which leadership is embedded.

Endnotes

² This vigil is literally imagined in this case as she was Dole's second wife and they met later in his life.

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APPENDIX: Sources of Speeches

Speaker	Date	Convention	Date Last Accessed
Barbara Bush	August 19, 1992	RNC - Houston	
		http://www.speeches-usa.com/Transcripts/039_bush.html	July 28, 2014
		http://www.c-span.org/video/?31360-1/republican-national-convention-address	March 1, 2016
Elizabeth Dole	August 14, 1996	RNC - San Diego	
		http://gos.sbc.edu/d/dole.html	July 28, 2014
		http://www.c-span.org/video/?c3840294/e-dole-1996	March 1, 2016
Hillary Clinton	August 27, 1996	DNC - Chicago	
		http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/politics-july-dec96-hillary-clinton/	March 1, 2016
		https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hF3Ef_n9WTY	March 1, 2016
Laura Bush	July 31, 2000	RNC - Philadelphia	
		http://womenshistory.about.com/od/laurabush/a/laura_bush_1rnc.htm	July 28, 2014
		https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b9bb5bFFz2k	March 1, 2016
Tipper Gore	August 17, 2000	DNC - Los Angeles	
		http://www.npr.org/news/national/election2000/demconvention/speech.tgore.html	March 1, 2016
		http://www.npr.org/news/national/election2000/demconvention/speech.tgore.html (audio)	March 1, 2016
Teresa Heinz Kerry	July 27, 2004	DNC - Boston	
		http://www.cbc.ca/news2/background/uselection2004/heinzkerry_dnc2004.html	March 1, 2016
		http://mashable.com/2012/08/30/first-lady-convention-speeches/	March 1, 2016
Laura Bush	August 31, 2004	RNC - New York	
		http://americanrhetoric.com/speeches/convention2004/laurabush2004rnc.htm	July 28, 2014
		http://www.c-span.org/video/?c4343655/laura-bush-speech-2004-republican-national-convention	March 1, 2016
Michelle Obama	August 25, 2008	DNC - Denver	
		http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=93963863	July 28, 2014
		http://mashable.com/2012/08/30/first-lady-convention-speeches/	March 1, 2016
Cindy McCain	September 4, 2008	RNC - New York	
		http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=94301516	July 28, 2014
		https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1KQRLS9YwPM	March 1, 2016

Speaker	Date	Convention	Date Last Accessed
Ann Romney http://www.npr.org/2012/08/28/160216442/transcript-ann-romneys-convention-speech http://mashable.com/2012/08/30/first-lady-convention-speeches/	August 28, 2012	RNC - Tampa	July 28, 2014 March 1, 2016
Michelle Obama http://www.npr.org/2012/09/04/160578836/transcript-michelle-obamas-convention-speech https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVGAI8o5i4o	September 4, 2012	DNC – Charlotte	July 28, 2014 March 1, 2016